# The Paracinematic Reality of Gravity's Rainbow

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## I

"History," Pynchon writes in Gravity's Rainbow, "is not woven by innocent hands."[1] According to Pynchon, history--or historical reality as a system of commonly agreed upon "facts"--is a manufactured product, an act of conscious creation similar to the creation of art; in fact, Pynchon treats the creation of art as the first step in the fabrication of reality. The contrived "realities," plots, and insidious grand designs in Gravity's Rainbow are actually the artifices of a ubiquitous "Them," who manipulate lives by producing illusory realities which become accepted as the empirically "real."

"They" posit illusions as reality in a variety of ways. Kekulé's dream of the aromatic Ring is used to illustrate the manner in which this is done, and to provide a central metaphor of dream-manufacture and distribution. The narrator wonders: "how is it we are each visited [in dreams] as individuals, each by exactly and only what he needs? Doesn't that imply a switching-path of some kind? a bureaucracy?" (410). Laszlo Jamf, in lecturing on Kekulé, whom Pynchon calls "Their brilliant employee" (413), specifically questions who "They" are: "'who, sent, the Dream?'" (413). One of the most developed characters exemplifying "Them" in Gravity's Rainbow is Gerhardt von Göll, a creator of a kindred form of dream--the dream world of film, the products of Hollywood and Ufa dream factories. Through references to von Göll and popular cinema, Pynchon posits that film is one of the primary means "They" have used to make reality out of illusion.

The film director von Göll, like "Them," is ubiquitous, apolitical, and amoral. He works for both the Germans and the Allies; he has business connections with both the scientists Laszlo Jamf and the drug-fiend Seaman Bodine. He is the "white knight of the black market" (492), but he also has established financial arrangements with the American tycoon Lyle Bland and with IG Farben. He explicitly defines himself as one of the elite, the chosen ones for whose

benefit the preterite must suffer and die. With a .45, he guards a stolen turkey from the hungry masses, gleefully commenting that by tomorrow, many of them will have starved, and there will be fewer with which to contend. When Slothrop expresses disgust at his heartless remark, von Göll (a.k.a. "Der Springer") says:

> "Despise me, exalt them [the poor], but remember, we define each other. Elite and preterite, we move through a cosmic design of darkness and light, and in all humility, I am one of the very few who can comprehend it in toto. Consider honestly therefore, young man, which side you would rather be on. While they suffer in perpetual shadows, it's . . . always . . . [breaking into song] bright days for the black mar-ket [fox trot]." (495)

The insidiousness of von Göll's purpose in Gravity's Rainbow becomes more apparent when he attempts to transform his role from a director of films to a creator of reality itself. One of his missions for the Allies is to stage and film, with actors "in plausible blackface" (113), images of black rocketeers to represent "the fictional Schwarzkommando" (113), Südwest Africans in Germany, in whose real existence no one yet believes. But later, when it is proven that the Schwarzkommando indeed exist, von Göll is overcome with the belief that he and his film have created them:

> Since discovering that Schwarzkommando are really in the Zone, leading real, paracinematic lives that have nothing to do with him or the phony Schwarzkommando footage he shot last winter in England for Operation Black Wing, Springer has been zooming around in a controlled ecstasy of megalomania. He is convinced that his film has somehow brought them into being. (388) [my emphasis]

Von Göll believes that the real Schwarzkommando are "paracinematic" versions of the fictional, cinematic ones filmed by him. His film has engendered reality.

Obviously, Pynchon is engaging in a profound play upon the concepts of art and reality. To von Göll, the creations of his imagination, which once had only a cinematic existence,have now become tangible, physical, real--or in his terms, paracinematic. Using the prefix "para-" in the sense of beyond or above, he believes that his creations have risen above a mere imaginative or subjective existence and have actually intruded into objective reality. He has begun to populate the external world, the empirically perceived objective life, with the products of his subjective imagination. When von Göll discovers that his cinematic Schwarzkommando have given birth to real, paracinematic ones, he is overcome with a megalomaniac urge to make all of life paracinematic by encompassing it entirely within a film. Francisco Squalidozzi, the leader of the Argentine anarchists, expresses to von Göll his desire to recreate the myth of Martin Fierro, the gaucho of the once-open pampas; von Göll assures Squalidozzi that by making a film, Martin Fierro, he can make the mythical gaucho and his free plains real by creating paracinematic versions of them, just as he had done with the Schwarzkommando:

> "It is my mission [. . .] to sow in the Zone seeds of reality. The historical moment demands this, and I can only be its servant. My images, somehow, have been chosen for incarnation. What I can do for the Schwarzkommando I can do for your dream of pampas and sky. . . ." (388)

From the Schwarzkommando to Martin Fierro, von Göll enlarges his ambition to create a world. This dream of God-like omnipotence becomes clear when Slothrop jokingly complains to von Göll that life is not a film. Von Göll replies: "'Not yet. Maybe not quite yet. You'd better enjoy it while you can. Someday, when the film is fast enough, the equipment pocket-size and burdenless and selling at people's prices, the lights and booms no longer necessary, then . . . then . . .'"(527). The seemingly mad director envisions a time when technological advances will make possible the filming of every important detail of life, so that all reality will become his paracinematic version of it. The irrepressible Springer is not one

to wait for technology to catch up with his ambitions, however, and, by the end of the novel, he has started his project of making reality paracinematic: "There is a movie going on, under the rug. On the floor, 24 hours a day, pull back the rug sure enough there's that damn movie! A really offensive and tasteless film by Gerhardt von Göll, daily rushes in fact from a project which will never be completed" (745).

Von Göll's endless film of reality is similar to another all-encompassing encyclopedic narrative described within the pages of Gravity's Rainbow--Brigadier Pudding's history:

> He started in on a mammoth work entitled Things That Can Happen in European Politics. Begin, of course, with England. "First," he wrote, "Bereshith, as it were: Ramsay MacDonald can die." By the time he went through resulting party alignments and possible permutations of cabinet posts, Ramsay MacDonald had died. "Never make it," he found himself muttering at the beginning of each day's work--"it's changing out from under me. Oh, dodgy--very dodgy." (77)

Pudding's project fails because he tries to meet reality on its own terms. By trying to anticipate and chronicle the mercurial sequence of unforeseen events, Pudding is at the mercy of causality and always lags one step behind. Von Göll, on the other hand, believes that he himself is the causal agent of a reality that he can create; he can control the cause and effect sequence of his movies, and when they become paracinematic or "real," he has actually affected an alteration of empirical reality. He makes a film about life by making life into a film. As the novel progresses toward its conclusion, von Göll's film of Martin Fierro is more an empirical than cinematic reality:

> The sets for the movie-to-be help some. The buildings are real, not a false front in sight. The boliche is stocked with real liquor, the pulpería with real food. The sheep, cattle, horses, and corrals

> are real. The huts are weatherproof and are being slept in. When von Göll leaves--if he ever comes--nothing will be struck. Any of the extras who want to stay are welcome. (613)

William Plater, in his book on Pynchon, The Grim Phoenix, writes that Pynchon uses film to illustrate that "life and illusion are both a matter of form."[2] Pudding, a less ambitious version of the artist, tries to follow the form of reality as it unfolds in its random, haphazard causal design, whereas von Göll imposes his own form upon reality and forces it to conform to his own design. He becomes an absurd example of Wallace Stevens' singer at Key West who is "the single artificer of the world."

II

Although "Der Springer" seems cast in the role of mad artist-inventor, popularized in horror films, Pynchon does not allow his reader to disregard the director's intentions, for he has left an enormous amount of cumulative evidence that film reality and historical reality have indeed become one and the same. The literally dozens of films mentioned in Gravity's Rainbow[3] are not used merely to complete an encyclopedia of popular culture; they are consistently used to show that art creates reality as surely as what is "real" creates art. Furthermore, the bulk of the textual evidence indicates that art, particularly the cinema, has created and is creating a world of imprisonment and victimization. As Edward Mendelson notes: "The popular modes that Pynchon assimilates into his encyclopedia of styles are never modes of liberation from the systems of oppression, but are instead a means of oppression and extinguishing."[4] To see how art has oppressed, one needs only to look at the films most frequently referred to in Gravity's Rainbow and observe how Pynchon interprets their effects on modern life.

One director/creator with whom von Göll must compete for the creation of the Schwarzkommando is Merian Cooper, whose King Kong is constantly referred to in Gravity's Rainbow. Cooper's words to Fay Wray, his leading actress, form an epigraph to Part Two of the

novel: "You will have the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood" (179). Pynchon develops Jessica Swanlake as a Fay Wray character. In the concluding pages of Part Two, she goes again into her "Fay Wray number" (275) which Pynchon describes as "a kind of protective paralysis [. . .] for the Fist of the Ape, for the lights of electric New York white-waying into the room you thought was safe, could never be penetrated.. . for the coarse black hair, the tendons of need, of tragic love" (275). But later in the novel, Slothrop assumes the same role when he wears "a blonde wig and the same long flowing white cross-banded number Fay Wray wears in her screentest scene with Robert Armstrong on the boat" (688). Immediately after Slothrop is transformed into Fay Wray, Pynchon modulates the prose of his novel into verse, a poem that David Cowart interprets as Fay Wray's soliloquy[5] which she delivers while tied to the sacrificial altar, waiting to be taken by the fist of the ape, King Kong:

> At that first moment, long before our flight:
> Ravine, tyrannosaurus (flying-mares
> And jaws cracked out of joint), the buzzing serpent
> That jumped you in your own stone living space,
> The pterodactyl or the Fall, no--just . . .
> While I first hung there, forest and night at one,
> Hung waiting with the torches on the wall.
> And waiting for the night's one Shape to come,
> I prayed then, not for Jack, still mooning sappy
> Along the weather-decks--no. I was thinking
> Of Denham--only him, with gun and camera
> Wisecracking in his best bum actor's way
> Through Darkest Earth, making the <u>unreal</u> <u>reel</u>.
> (689) [my emphasis]

In this section, Pynchon makes one further reference to Fay Wray, implicitly alluding to all the characters of the novel who are models of her archetype: "We've seen them under a thousand names . . . 'Greta [Margherita] Erdmann' is only one, these dames whose job it is always to cringe from the Terror"(689). In their own contexts, Fay Wray, Slothrop, Jessica Swanlake, and Margherita Erdmann are sexual symbols of a civilization founded upon structures of power and powerlessness, here described sadomasochistically.

Pale and blonde, they also represent white society's fear of the power and danger of darkness, alternately described as "the Fist of the Ape," "the night's one Shape," and "the Terror."

Cowart remarks that the Fay Wray soliloquy alludes to "the magical ability of directors to make the unreal real."[6] The pun, "making the unreal reel," indicates that throughout Gravity's Rainbow the unreal or fictional hovers in the filmic imagination, ready to be made real. Pynchon suggests that civilized man's primordial fear of primitive darkness has created the film King Kong, and now the process of creation has been reversed--the film has created, in the context of the novel, an empirical reality: "the legend of the black scapeape we cast down like Lucifer from the tallest erection in the world has come, in the fullness of time, to generate its own children, running around inside Germany even now--the Schwarzkommando" (275). As the "unreal" King Kong was abducted from his primitive lair, mounted the Empire State Building, and threatened to destroy the entire city, so the Herero tribesmen, the "real" Schwarzkommando, were abducted from Südwest Afrika and brought to Germany, where they erected and mounted civilization's most powerful tower--the 00001 Rocket--and threatened to destroy the entire world.

Edwin Treacle tries to convince his colleagues in the Allied psychological warfare section that their repressed fear of darkness, so aptly manifest in King Kong, had created the Schwarzkommando: "Why wouldn't they admit that their repressions had [. . .] incarnated real and living men, likely (according to the best intelligence) in possession of real and living weapons [. . .] they are real, they are living, as you pretend to scream inside the Fist of the Ape . . ." (276-77). As one of the researchers in "The White Visitation," Treacle is probably more aware than most how the sadomasochistic implications of the film were fertile seeds in the subconscious of a generation of viewers. Treacle works with the behaviorists who use a related, film-based form of conditioning on Grigori, the octopus that is trained to attack "The White Visitation's" agent, Katje Borgesius: "The reel is threaded, the lights are switched off, Grigori's attention is directed to the screen, where an image already walks"

(113). Treacle correctly suspects that the film of Katje walking worked on Grigori's primitive consciousness as King Kong worked on the dreams of viewers--they both are forms of conditioning: one specifically neurological, the other broadly cultural.

It is ironic that while von Göll gloats about his supposed creation of life in the Schwarzkommando, he is totally unaware of his greatest success--the case of Franz Pökler. As he must share creative honors with Merian Cooper for the Schwarzkommando, von Göll must compete with Pökler's favorite director, Fritz Lang. A Lang film which has left a strong imprint on Gravity's Rainbow is his 1929 Die Frau im Mond (The Woman in the Moon). Produced in the gestation period of Germany's rocket program, the film, which tells the story of a rocket trip to the moon, employed as technical advisors some scientists who later worked on the V-2; indeed, Pynchon's rocket engineer Pökler "knew some of the people who'd worked on the special effects" (159). In Gravity's Rainbow there are two rockets, the 00000 and the 00001, "a good Rocket to take us to the stars [and] an evil Rocket for the World's suicide" (727). Die Frau im Mond is Gravity's Rainbow's hopeful fantasy of the good rocket, and, like King Kong, it is another example of film myth becoming reality--the fictional reality of the 00000 and the historical reality of the first V-2, which, according to David Cowart, bore the emblem "Die Frau im Mond."[7]

Other Lang films which play significant roles in Gravity's Rainbow are those that Siegfried Kracauer calls, in From Caligari to Hitler, the "tyrant films" that depict "the unavoidable alternative of tyranny or chaos,"[8] or, in Pynchon's terms, paranoia or anti-paranoia. Kracauer's sometimes doctrinaire thesis is that Weimar Germany, buffeted by the winds of economic and political chaos, yearned for an omnipotent controlling power similar to the "supermen-tyrants" depicted in films, and that the Germans were conditioned by these cinematic figures to accept the real tyrant-figure that came in the form of Adolf Hitler. Lang's favorite actor for the criminal supermen roles was Rudolf Klein-Rogge, "whom Pökler idolized and wanted to be like" (578). Klein-Rogge is most famous for his role as Dr. Mabuse, a hypnotist like Dr. Caligari who commits crimes by mind control. Of his roles, the one

which most impresses Pökler is that of Rotwang, the mad scientist inventor in Metropolis, Lang's 1927 masterpiece. Of Metropolis, and its effect on Pökler, Pynchon writes:

> Klein-Rogge was carrying nubile actresses off to rooftops when King Kong was still on the tit. with no motor skills to speak of. Well, one nubile actress anyway, Brigitte Helm in Metropolis. Great movie. Exactly the world Pökler and evidently quite a few others were dreaming about those days, a Corporate City-state where technology was the source of power, the engineer worked closely with the administrator, the masses labored unseen far underground, and ultimate power lay with a single leader at the top, fatherly and benevolent and just, who wore magnificent-looking suits and whose name Pökler couldn't remember, being too taken with Klein-Rogge playing the mad inventor that Pökler and his codisciples under Jamf longed to be--indispensable to those who ran the Metropolis, yet, at the end, the untamable lion who could let it all crash, girl, State, masses, himself, asserting his reality against them all in one last roaring plunge from rooftop to street. . . . (578)

In Nazi Germany, Pökler got a part in the world he had dreamed of, although the "single leader at the top," Adolf Hitler, was hardly "fatherly and benevolent." And Pynchon's view of modern society, as chronicled in Gravity's Rainbow, is based on a Metropolis model. According to Pynchon, the world has been transformed into an immense, caste-conscious corporate state, governed not by a single leader but by cartels, of which IG Farben and Shell are the most powerful. The scientists and engineers work with the administrators of these cartels--Laszlo Jamf's relationship with Lyle Bland seems to duplicate Rotwang's with his leader--but the lot of the average engineer like Pökler is not much better than that of the workers. Pökler is far from the "untamable lion" that he envisions himself to be. And Pynchon's view of future society is also based on Lang's model:

> It's a giant factory-state here, a City of the Future full of extrapolated 1930s swoop-façaded and balconied skyscrapers, lean chrome caryatids with bobbed hairdos, classy airships of all descriptions drifting in the boom and hush of the city abysses, golden lovelies sunning in roof-gardens and turning to wave as you pass. (674)

The Herero tribesmen working on the apocalyptic 00001 for the "World's suicide," are analogues for King Kong; they are also the workers in Metropolis. From Africa, they were brought "to the Metropolis, that great dull zoo, as specimens of a possibly doomed race" (315), and after the war, they live "around Nordhausen [the German rocket factory site] and Bleicherode, down in abandoned mine shafts" (315). In these "underground communities" (315), they use the technology of the elite, the V-2 rocket, to bring destruction upon themselves and their masters, just as the underground workers in Metropolis turned their machines against their rulers and themselves.

As the film myth of King Kong generated the Herero tribesmen, so Die Frau im Mond gave birth to the V-2, and Metropolis created the image of a feudal economic and social system, bent on self-destruction. An even more explicit example of this process is Horst Achtfaden's description of the secret 00000 project: "'We were given code-names. Characters from a movie, somebody said. The other aerodynamics people were "Spörri" and "Hawasch." I was called "Wenk"'" (455). The characters are from Lang's Dr. Mabuse der Spieler. And though Achtfaden's version does not state it, the reader can assume that the project supervisor Weissmann/Blicero probably gave himself the name "Mabuse," in an attempt to impose the reality of this story of a superman-tyrant upon the project, with himself cast in the omnipotent role.

With Pökler, the cultural, neurological, and psychical effects of film are brought together. When Franz and his wife Leni go to see Lang's 1924 epic Die Niebelungen, he cannot stay awake, for his days in inflation-ridden Weimar Germany are filled by scavenging for coal. "Pökler would nod back into sleep with bursts of destroying beauty there for his

dreams to work on, speaking barbaric gutturals for the silent mouths . . ." (578). Film works on Pökler's dreams as it does on the primitive consciousness of Grigori. His acute sensitivity to the subliminal effects of film makes him a likely choice for von Göll's greatest paracinematic success.

Pökler is deeply implicated in the process by which film makes reality, for his personal reality is repeatedly appropriated and made the locus for the transactions of film and reality. During the filming of one scene in von Göll's Alpdrücken,[9] Margherita Erdmann conceives a child, Bianca, with her co-star Max Schlepzig, and when the film is shown at the Ufa theatre, Pökler, in the audience, leaves with the scene still on his mind, thinking:

> God, Erdmann was beautiful. How many other men, shuffling out again into depression Berlin, carried the same image from Alpdrücken to some drab fat excuse for a bride? How many shadow-children would be fathered on Erdmann that night? (397)

The shadow-child Pökler fathers, Ilse, eventually becomes a film vision to him, as the Nazis allow him to see her for only short intervals, spaced over long periods of time, so that he is not even sure she is the same child as before:

> The only continuity has been her name, and Zwölfkinder, and Pökler's love--love something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child . . . what would the time scale matter, a 24th of a second or a year? (422)

Pynchon implies that the presentation of an arranged series of images, which creates the illusion of movement and life in a film, can be used empirically to create the illusion of a child's life in reality; in this case, the process is used insidiously for control and manipulation. Pökler's terrifying

realization--"Isn't that what they made of my child, a film?" (398)--represents how often art can be pressed into service in order to alter life and to perpetuate contrived and unnatural structures. As Richard Poirier writes: "The loved child was . . . begotten of a film and has since become as if 'framed' by film, just as Gottfried is at last 'framed' by the Rocket that Pökler helped develop."[10] Poirier's use of "framed" can be seen in two senses: framed by the movie still and "framed" in the colloquial sense of being unjustly implicated in a contrived plot. Both senses of the word apply to Pökler in his real relationship with his daughter and his involvement with the rocket project. Pynchon makes the connection when he describes the photographing of experimental rocket descents:

> There has been this strange connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement, for at least two centuries--since Leibniz, in the process of inventing calculus, used the same approach to break up the trajectories of cannonballs through the air. And now Pökler was about to be given proof that these techniques had been extended past images on film, to human lives. (407)

The flashing of stills that counterfeits movement in a film also counterfeits a life, that of Pökler's daughter. Ilse, conceived in sexual dreams inspired by "frames" of a film, is herself placed in a "frame" of experience created by Weissmann and the Nazis to "frame" her father.

III.

As a final, more forceful illustration that our reality is indeed paracinematic, Pynchon presents evidence that the novel presents a view, not of reality, but of film reality--that the novel is indeed a film.[11]

In his sudden shifts from scene to scene and character to character without the connective material readers have come to expect from realistic narration, Pynchon emulates the cinematic technique of montage, and this juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated episodes achieves the montage effect that Sergei Eisenstein

defines as "the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other."[12]

Also, Pynchon is one of the few novelists to have orchestrated a musical score for his novels, in the manner of background music for a film. Scenes are accompanied by "mellow close-harmony reeds humming a moment in the air" (196), or "bridge music here, bright with xylophones" (222), or "conga drums and a peppy tropical orchestra" (229). When Slothrop, in the guise of Ian Scuffling, is chased through Zurich, Pynchon makes sure that we know that the music is: "Zunnggg! diddilung, diddila-ta-ta-ta, ya-ta-ta-ta William Tell Overture here" (262). The most common form of music in Gravity's Rainbow is song. Characters will, if the occasion arises, croon a ballad, as in a romantic musical. Slothrop woos Katje Borgesius with "It's still too soon,/It's not as if we'd kissed and kindled . . ." (195), and Roger Mexico laments his loss of Jessica Swanlake with "I dream that I have found us both again,/With spring so many strangers' lives away . . ." (627). The abundance of song gives credence to Simmon's contention that "basically Gravity's Rainbow is a musical."[13]

Pynchon incorporates into Gravity's Rainbow many stock conventions of popular films. Roger and Jessica's affair is "a typical WWII romantic intrigue" (247), begun with "what Hollywood likes to call a 'cute meet'"(38). Jessica has "a Fay Wray look" (57). They speak to each other in a "flip film-dialogue" (121). Pirate Prentice's favorite expression was "learned [. . .] at the films [. . .] the exact mischievous Irish grin your Dennis Morgan chap goes about cocking down" (32). Slothrop asks his friend Tantivy Mucker-Maffick, "'what are you telling him? [. . .] I'm some kind of a Van Johnson or something?'" (182). But later he is "Errol Flynn frisk[ing] his mustache" (248). He speaks in a "Groucho Marx voice" (246). This encyclopedia of stock characters in popular films and of their mannerisms is part of Pynchon's commentary on the effect of films on character in the twentieth century. Ours is a generation which has learned to kiss by the example of Clark Gable and Elizabeth Taylor, to walk like Gary Cooper, and to talk with affected "coolness" and nonchalance like Marlon Brando.

Film stars, Pynchon suggests, have set standards for manners which all levels of our society have been quick to emulate.[14]

Pynchon also borrows the technical terminology of the cinema in many of his descriptive passages. This is how he describes the former actress Margherita Erdmann approaching Slothrop who waits for her at the spa Bad Karma: "When she materializes it is a shy fade-in, as Gerhardt von Göll [her director] must have brought her on a time or two, not moving so much as Slothrop's own vantage swooping to her silent closeup stabilized presently across from him, finishing his beer, bumming a cigarette" (459). Another scene is described "from a German camera-angle" (229). Pirate Prentice's daydreams of his former lover, Scorpia Mossmoon, are triggered by a drawing which is "a DeMille set really, slender and oiled girls in attendance, a suggestion of midday light coming through from overhead" (71). The abandoned German rocket firing range is camouflaged by "German Expressionist ripples streaming gray and black all over it" (513).

The abundance of Pynchon's references to film and film technique causes George Levine to write that Gravity's Rainbow is virtually an encyclopedia of the myths of popular and non-literary culture, and that "these myths appear in the frames of motion pictures so that we are at once entertained, engaged, and conscious of the potential artificiality."[15] Pynchon includes an episode which might suggest the reader's response to Gravity's Rainbow's potential reality and artificiality: the story of Takeshi and Ichizo. When the two Komical Kamikazes improvise a haiku to describe the epileptic thrashings of Old Kenosho, the loony radarman, Pynchon intrudes to address his readers:

> You didn't like the haiku. It wasn't ethereal enough? Not Japanese at all? In fact it sounded like something right outa Hollywood? Well, Captain--yes you, Marine Captain Esberg from Pasadena--you, have just had, the Mystery Insight! [. . .] Yes, it is a movie! (691)

Captain Esberg's Mystery Insight is a possible model for the insight Pynchon expects to elicit from many of his perceptive readers--that they are reading a movie.

With the evidence that the novel is a film, the reader can accept Slothrop's own explanation of his disappearance from the pages of the novel-as-film; according to him, he has been edited out of the movie Gravity's Rainbow:

> They've stopped the inflow/outflow and here you are trapped inside Their frame with your wastes piling up, ass hanging out all over Their Movieola viewer, waiting for Their editorial blade. Reminded, too late, of how dependent you are on Them, for neglect if not good will: Their neglect is your freedom. (694)

After he has been edited from the film, Slothrop's real existence is denied by the fictional characters of the novel. His name is "apocryphal" (696), and he is "being broken down [. . .] and scattered" (738). Even the reality of his arch-enemy is doubted: "Jamf was only a fiction . . ."(738). At the end, only Seaman Bodine "can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more" (740). Like the fictional characters, the "real" characters of the novel deny Slothrop's reality. Earlier in the novel, Slothrop sees Mickey Rooney (a private in the Army then), and Pynchon writes: "He knows he is seeing Mickey Rooney, though Mickey Rooney, wherever he may go, will repress the fact that he ever saw Slothrop" (382). By mixing real characters (from Mickey Rooney to Walter Rathenau) with fictional characters (who themselves are divided into categories of real and fictional), Pynchon further blurs the distinctions between reality and fiction, or paracinematic and cinematic.

## IV

Pynchon presents reality as a series of fictional Chinese boxes that the reader opens one by one until he reaches the last one, in which he himself is contained. In the course of reading Gravity's Rainbow, which situates itself in World War Two, the reader, in the beginning, attempts to assume a conventional role outside the novel, observing from the comfortable distance of his own moment this fiction which describes this "theatre" of war. From the beginning, however, the word "theatre" signifies two distinct meanings in

Gravity's Rainbow--it denotes specifically the locus of battle, but it also connotes the sense of the war as staged or directed, a conspiracy about which the ordinary participants or actors are ignorant. On the first page the narrator hints--"The Evacuation still proceeds, but it's all theatre" (3). And later the main character, Tyrone Slothrop, concludes, "none of it was real before this moment: only elaborate theatre to fool you" (267). Another character, Enzian, suspects, "Perhaps it's theatre, but they seem no longer to be Allies" (326), and later realizes, "this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre" (521).

Then, on the last page of the novel, the narrator addresses his readers directly with the implication that they have been drawn unwittingly within the fictional boundaries of the novel and are now characters in another "Theatre of War"--a movie theatre in contemporary Los Angeles, over which a nuclear missile is poised, ready to strike the first blow of the Final Apocalypse. Why a movie theatre? We, the readers, are what Pynchon calls, "old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?)" (760). And we, now doomed moviegoers, have been lured to this particular theatre, the Orpheus, by the machinations of its manager Richard M. Zhlubb, a thinly disguised version of Richard Nixon, who has staged a Bengt Ekerot/Maria Casarés Film Festival celebrating the actor and actress who played the roles of Death in Bergman's The Seventh Seal and Cocteau's Orphée.[16] The movie we "old fans" have been seeing before the "film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out" (760) might be entitled Gravity's Rainbow--"The screen is a dim page spread before us" (760). But it is more fitting to think that we have "read a movie,"[17] a movie-novel whose pages are a dim screen spread before us. Characters in the novel have become, through the interface of the screen, characters in a movie, and vice-versa. And now, finding ourselves characters in the novel, watching a movie until the "film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out," we learn that "in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see . . . it is now a closeup of the face, a face we all know--" (760). The implication is that the face is our own,

the cinematic version of our paracinematic selves in the theatre.

V

Tony Tanner calls the Orpheus "the old theatre of our civilization."[18] The cumulative effect of Pynchon's theatre metaphors and cinematic references is to see not only the novel as film but the world as film as well. The ancestry of these metaphors is very old, and Pynchon shares some purposes with these ancient usages. In Calderón's Eucharistic play El gran teatro del mundo, Mankind is represented as the leading actor of the play of life directed by God.[19] Alonso de Orozco, Gracían, and Jaime Falcó all elaborate this convention, which is probably best expressed in Spanish classical literature by Quevedo's interpretation of Epictetus: "Life is a comedy; the world, a theatre, and all men players; God, the author. It is He who distributes the roles; it is mankind's duty to play them well."[20] A subsidiary theme of this convention is that popularized by Calderón's La vida es sueño--life is a dream from which we awaken only to enter divine reality.

To Pynchon, life is both a play (or film) and a dream. What passes for reality is not the creation of God but the paracinematic artifices of the elite, be they directors like von Göll, behaviorists like Pointsman, or theatre owners like Zhlubb. This reality is the product of the "dream factories" of the movie industry. The dream-makers of the elite push films as they do drugs, since both elicit illusions. Wimpe, the omnipresent agent for IG Farben, traffics in oneirine, which he hopes can be a universal painkiller. The word oneirine is derived from the Greek oneiros, dream. In explaining oneirine to Tchitcherine, Wimpe says: "'There is nearly complete parallelism between analgesia and addiction. The more pain it takes away, the more we desire it'" (348). The dreams created by drugs and films are analgesic and, hence, addictive, because they create artificial realities less painful than the natural one, which is a relentless cycle of suffering and death. Pynchon illustrates how films can ease the pain of death by citing the example of John Dillinger, who was killed after seeing Clark Gable's Manhattan Melodrama:

> John Dillinger, at the end, found a few seconds' strange mercy in the movie images that hadn't quite yet faded from his eyeballs--Clark Gable going off unregenerate to fry in the chair, voices gentle out of the deathrow steel so long, Blackie [. . .] there was still for the doomed man some shift of personality in effect--the way you've felt for a little while afterward in the real muscles of your face and voice, that you were Gable, the ironic eyebrows, the proud, shining, snakelike head--to help Dillinger through the bushwhacking, and a little easier into death. (516)

Dillinger's fate is made easier because he has become a paracinematic Clark Gable and is able to accept death with the same arrogance and nonchalance as Gable's cinematic character. Pynchon compares Dillinger with Närrisch, who also suspects that he might be the victim of a bushwhacking, arranged by the self-serving Springer. But unlike Dillinger, whose fate was made easier by a movie, "Närrisch hasn't been to a movie since Der Müde Tod. That's so long ago he's forgotten its ending, the last Rilke-elegiac shot of weary Death leading the two lovers away hand in hand through the forget-me-nots" (516). Pynchon implies that Närrisch's inability to remember the end of Lang's 1921 film is unfortunate; for in it, the actor Bernard Goetzke, according to Kracauer, "brings the humane character of Death to the fore," a character showing "tenderness" and "an inner opposition to the duty enjoined on him."[21] If Närrisch could remember these characteristics of Death, he might be able to accept his fate more easily. But. . . .

Films and drugs are shown to be analgesic because of their ability to transform reality and history into more palatable forms; yet there is no salvation in them. William Plater notes: "Films, drugs, and sado-masochism are typical systems . . . used to create illusions that victimize their adherents."[22] For example, Slothrop, like other characters given illusory views of reality, has believed "every wretched Hollywood lie down to and including this year's big hit, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (641). The effect has been that "They" have been able to "'put him on the Dream,'" (697) a Hollywood Dream of "Happyville, in-

stead of [. . .] Pain City" (644-45).

Pynchon reveals how both film and drugs work similarly to mask a brutal reality when one of Slothrop's drug-induced visions of the war takes on a Disney-like innocence. Under the influence of the sodium amytal given him by the behaviorists of "The White Visitation," Slothrop sees this: "For a moment, ten thousand stiffs humped under the snow in the Ardennes take on the sunny Disneyfied look of numbered babies under white wool blankets, waiting to be sent to blessed parents in places like Newton Upper Falls" (70). During the Advent Mass, a sober Roger Mexico has a similar vision, yet he sees through the illusion: "the lads in Hollywood telling us how grand it all is over here, how much fun, Walt Disney causing Dumbo the elephant to clutch to that feather like how many carcasses under the snow tonight among the white-painted tanks" (135). The reality of the war is too painful to accept, so the directors of the new "theatre of the world" provide a paracinematic reality in the form of analgesic illusion.

According to Pynchon, films have become a new opiate of the masses. It is no accident that von Göll's endless film, which will make reality paracinematic, is entitled "New Dope" (745). The Hollywood Dream, like von Göll's "new dope" and oneirine, is an artificially contrived perception of the way things are. It is a mode of control used by "Them" to divert the attention of the masses from the self-destructive direction in which they are being led. And toward the conclusion of the novel, Pynchon correlates the Hollywood Dream with the American Dream when he makes a caricature of President Nixon, the manager of a movie theatre who takes "you" on a fatal ride on the Hollywood Freeway. Before "you" are taken to your predestined encounter with the rocket at the Orpheus Theatre, Richard M. Zhlubb points out all the social outcasts and says: "'Relax [. . .] There'll be a nice secure home for them all, down in Orange County. Richt next to Disneyland'"(756). With the dream images of Disney, Gable, Klein-Rogge, Bengt Ekerot, and Maria Casarés, the reality of the Western world has been manufactured, made paracinematic. No drug, Pynchon suggests, could have been more universal than film. "They" have lured "us" into the "Orpheus," "the old theatre of our civi-

lization," where unless "the film has broken,or a projector bulb has burned out," manufactured dreams will blind us to our encounter with destruction.

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Notes

[1] Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973), 277. All further quotations will be from this edition; references will be in parentheses.

[2] William M. Plater, The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), 124.

[3] David Cowart, Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980), 33. Cowart identifies twenty-five movies, nine directors, and forty-eight actors and actresses in Gravity's Rainbow.

[4] Edward Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia," in Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 184.

[5] Cowart, Thomas Pynchon, 36.

[6] Ibid.

[7] David Cowart, "Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich in Gravity's Rainbow," Literature/Film Quarterly, 6, No. 4 (1978), 364.

[8] Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), 77.

[9] Alpdrücken is German for nightmare. This reinforces Pynchon's belief that films work on the same level as dreams.

[10] Richard Poirier, "Rocket Power," in Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 175.

[11] Because of the concluding scene in which the reader seems to have become a viewer of a film, as well as Gravity's Rainbow's adoption of some of the formal characteristics of film, it is now almost a commonplace of Pynchon criticism to call his novel a

film. In addition to Cowart's Thomas Pynchon and "Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich," other helpful studies are: Scott Simmon, "Beyond the Theater of War: Gravity's Rainbow as Film," Literature/Film Quarterly, 6, No. 4 (1978), 347-63; Bertram Lippman, "The Reader of Movies: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow," University of Denver Quarterly, 12, No. 1 (1977), 1-46; George Levine, "V-2," in Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 178-91.

[12] Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 12.

[13] Scott Simmon, "Beyond the Theater of War: Gravity's Rainbow as Film," Literature/Film Quarterly, 6, No. 4 (1978), 352.

[14] The manner in which many Americans have been unable to distinguish their lives and mannerisms from film and movie stars' is treated comically in Woody Allen's movie, Play It Again, Sam.

[15] George Levine, "V-2," in Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 188.

[16] Simmon, 349.

[17] Bertram Lippman, "The Reader of Movies: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow," University of Denver Quarterly, 12, No. 1 (1977), 1-46.

[18] Tony Tanner, "V. and V-2," in Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 55.

[19] A helpful synopsis of the Spanish classical convention of the world as a stage can be found in Otis H. Green, Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian Mind in Literature from El Cid to Calderón (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

[20] Francisco de Quevedo, Obras en Verso, ed. L. Astrana Marín (Madrid, 1932), 732b.

[21] Kracauer, 91.

[22] Plater, 209.